

The Impact of Student Involvement on Success After College

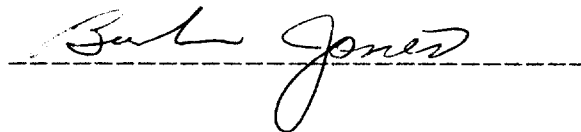
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Barbara Jones", is written over a horizontal dashed line.

**Ball State University
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ABSTRACT

This project focuses on student involvement in extracurricular activities while in college and the affects that involvement has on the student's success after college. Several studies have looked into how campus involvement effects students while in college. Research findings of these studies were utilized to create a seven question survey instrument. Surveys were sent to Ball State University Alumni who were members of the Student Leadership Development Board. Telephone interviews were conducted about their campus involvement and how it influenced their post-college success. The results of these interviews are analyzed and discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many individuals played a significant role in the completion of this project. Special thanks goes to Dr. Barbara Jones. Her encouragement throughout my student involvement here at Ball State University steered me towards a new career path and ultimately this thesis topic. Her suggestion of working with another student, Stacey Keffaber, who was also interested in this area of research turned out to be a blessing. Guidance with the methodology and research also proved to be helpful.

Stacey provided continued support and inspiration throughout the project. As a graduate student working on a master's degree in College Student Personnel, her knowledge and current experience with academic work in the area provided me with excellent direction for research in this field. Having another person to work with was especially helpful those nights when phone calls seemed they would never turn into actual interviews.

Finally thanks to those Student Leadership Development Board alumni who participated in the phone interviews or sent back completed surveys by mail. Conversations proved to be helpful for a senior writing her Honors Thesis and encouraging to a senior about to begin her "after college" experience. Their overall positive enthusiasm helped to make the project more enjoyable.

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INTRODUCTION

"Why should I get involved in campus activities? What will I gain from campus involvement?" These questions are posed by millions of college students every year as they try to create their personalized college experience. It is up to Student Affairs personnel to provide encouraging replies full of positive incentives to assure students that campus involvement is indeed an integral part of their college experience. On the surface, involvement in campus activities can be seen as an avenue to meet new people and to have fun, but it goes much deeper than that.

Few students realize the personal development that will occur when they involve themselves with out-of-class activities available on a college campus. Several professionals in the Student Affairs field have looked at how involvement relates to students' success while in college. Areas of interest include the influence of involvement on retention rates (Noel, Levitz, Salure, Associates, 1986), academic learning and competence, personal values development, interpersonal skills (Kuh, 1993).

Involvement is defined as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience (Astin, 1984, p. 297)." Involvement opportunities vary from campus to campus, but can include working on campus, joining student organizations and clubs, doing research with professors, playing intramural or collegiate sports, and volunteering in the community. Any combination of these activities can create a meaningful college experience. The

question is, how do they impact the student once their college experience is over?

The purpose of this thesis is to answer the question, how does campus involvement influence success after college? Research on the long term effects of involvement has been suggested (Kuh, 1993 and Pace, 1979), but not much conducted. By studying the long term effects of involvement, universities and colleges can evaluate their current student programs, measure their effectiveness, and assess what areas need improvement. The study for this project focuses on the skills gained by being involved in extracurricular activities.

Student Leadership Development Board (SLDB) alumni were asked what skills they had gained, how they related to their job search, which ones they still used, and what skills necessary for success they needed more exposure to or did not gain. This student organization was targeted, because most past members of SLDB were involved in several extracurricular activities such as sororities, fraternities, student government, academic honoraries, and service organizations.

Although the conclusions of this study will be stated in terms of impact of involvement in extracurricular activities on general students' success, actual results were limited to SLDB alumni from 1979 to 1992. Also, responses from those interviewed were strictly how they felt involvement in extracurricular activities had influenced their success. Success and achievement were used simultaneously. The actual definition of success/ achievement was left up to the interviewee; at no time did we ask for a specific measure of the SLDB alumni success. Extracurricular activities are defined as out-of-class learning opportunities that offer development of life skills such as teamwork, communication, leadership, and organization. Student Leadership

Development Board is defined as a student organization whose main goal is to encourage leadership development for other student organizations through consultant services, mini-workshops, and the All-Campus Conference.

This thesis includes research, an involvement study, its analysis, and conclusions and recommendations. Student involvement in extracurricular activities and the impact it has on those students is the focal point of the research conducted for this project. Though limited, the survey administered for this study attempts to obtain solid comments on the positive and possible negative impacts of student involvement. Through data analysis and cross reference with other sources, recommendations for continuance of current effective programming and restructuring or creation of additional services will be made.

institutions from the best ones. Astin (1985, p. 60-61) declares,

True excellence lies in the institution's ability to affect its students and faculty favorably, to enhance their intellectual and scholarly development, and to make a positive difference in their lives. The most excellent institutions are, in this view, those that have the greatest impact--'add the most value,' as economists would say--on the student's knowledge and personal development.

The Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education (1984, p. 17) states, "Perhaps the most important (condition) for improving undergraduate education is student involvement..." Involvement is defined as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. (Astin, 1984, p. 297). In his book Achieving Educational Excellence, Astin (1985, p. 133) defines his theory of involvement with the statement, "Students learn by becoming involved." He explains this in more detail through the following five ideas:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. The objects may be highly generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry examination).
2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum: that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.
3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in academic work, for instance, can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (whether the student reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydreams).
4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement.

Research states that involvement does have positive effects on college students. Thus it seems logical to say that the campus culture should encourage involvement. The quality of the education received at an institution is directly related to this culture and the programs it offers its students. The overall college experience including coursework, interpersonal relations, and extracurricular activities may in fact impact the student more than any one specific element of that experience (Terenzini and Pascarella, 1994).

In order for the campus culture to encourage involvement, involvement should be imbedded in the mission of the university. By doing this, the institution makes a commitment to involvement and promises to keep it in mind when setting policies and procedures. Through positive relations between the president and chief student affairs officer and their combined effort to recognize the importance of student involvement, the expectation that student involvement will be a part of the college experience will be set (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates, 1991).

To insure that involvement opportunities are providing what students want and need, on going assessment should occur. Using assessment tools such as the Student Development Task Inventory, the College Student Experience Questionnaire, and the Student Lifestyle Inventory, student affairs administrators can substantiate the influence of the out-of-class learning opportunities they make available. This documentation can prove that extracurricular activities are just as vital to a student's learning as what happens inside the classroom. Furthermore, taxpayers and alumni can be assured that their donations are being spent wisely. Perhaps the positive results of these types of assessments can improve the relations between student

affairs and academic affairs (Bryant and Bradley, 1992).

Involvement in extracurricular activities impacts students in many ways. Areas of interest include the influence of involvement on retention rates (Noel, Levitz, Salure, Associates, 1986), academic learning and competence, personal values development, and interpersonal skills (Kuh, 1993). In the 1983 study by Schuh and Leverty, three students were reported as saying that they had changed their future career plans due to their experience with a leadership role in an extracurricular activity.

By researching how involvement impacts students while in college, the root of student development can be found. According to Hood (1984, p.16), "Student development is a term that focuses on one of the major purposes of higher education and emphasizes the ways in which professionals in the student services field contribute to the development of people through higher education." Involvement in extracurricular activities could be a prime support for student development.

By asking questions, conducting studies, and researching, a better understanding of the effects of extracurricular activities can be created. In their research, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) bring up several questions to consider about the effect college has on students. First of all, do students really develop during the college years and if so, was the change really due to their being in college or did some other influence cause the change?

Additionally, does the type of institution affect the impact the student feels? For example, a small, private university may have a completely different impact on its students than a large, public university does on its students. The fact that within the same institution, students may not all be influenced by the same experiences should

also be considered. Then lastly, when two students are at the same institution, involved in the same activities, they may yet be impacted differently based on their personal backgrounds, gender, race, etc.

One area of current interest is that of commuter students. Providing quality programs and sufficient involvement opportunities for students not living on campus has been a long standing challenge. Involvement in campus activities can provide a connection to the student life at the university for commuter students. Thus, this connection allows them to have a more positive experience (Abrahamowicz, 1988).

Much of the learning that takes place outside the classroom can be described as the development of life skills. Research has found several skills to be acquired through involvement in extracurricular activities. In one study, student leaders were asked about the influence of their experience on selected life skills. Most reported that their experience had greatly influenced their communication skills, teamwork skills, decision making skills, assertiveness skills, planning skills, and organizing skills; the greatest of these were teamwork, planning and communication (Schuh and Lavery, 1983).

Two additional skills that either are gained or improved upon through involvement in extracurricular activities are autonomy (Kuh, 1993) and self-esteem (Astin and Kent, 1983). Of course levels of life skills attainment will be different for every student, but the proof that some of the skills are acquired by some students is encouragement to student affairs professionals to continue their work. An assessment of involvement by The Study Group on the Condition of Excellence in American Higher Education allowed for the following affirmation about involved college students, "the

greater will be their growth and achievement, their satisfaction with their educational experience, and the more likely they are to continue their learning (1984, p.17)."

A study (Howard, 1986) looking at college experiences and managerial performance noted several skills that were positive effects of extracurricular involvement. Decision making, creativity, organizing and planning, and interpersonal skills were associated with involvement in extracurricular activities and/or holding a leadership position in an activity. Involvement was stated as being one of the primary predictors for managerial success. This study and several previous studies done by American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) found many positive correlations with involvement in extracurricular activities.

In fact, Howard (1986, p. 531) felt that, "the relationship of extracurricular activities in college and later management success may be better established than is readily apparent." Higher salaries were attained by those individuals who had been involved while in college, particularly those who had held leadership positions. Also, some of the more successful managers were those who had made sure that extracurricular social and athletic activities had been a part of their college experience. There were solid connections between high energy people who desired advancement and students who actively participated in extracurricular activities. Strong work ethics were associated with involvement also (Howard, 1986).

As the job market looks more and more questionable, students need to consider what characteristics, skills, and activities will set them ahead of the rest. Looking at this question at the beginning of their college career, students have the opportunity to build a shining portfolio. Involvement and leadership positions in extracurricular

activities can offer students what corporate recruiters want. The AT&T study affirms this with, "...a well-rounded curriculum and campus life appears generally most appropriate for the preparation of future executives and leaders (Howard, 1986)."

METHODOLOGY

Initial research was done in the area of student involvement in extracurricular activities and the impact that involvement had on the students. Once the decision was made to look into the impact of involvement on students' success after college, research was conducted to find what skills students gain from involvement in extracurricular activities. From this, the seven question survey was created (Appendix A). For questions one through three, ten skills were listed and participants were asked to rank them in order of importance to obtain personal/professional achievement and then to check those they felt they had gained through involvement in student organizations and those they currently used. The remaining questions asked about the relationship between involvement and attainment of their first job, usage of skills gained through involvement in their job, skills necessary for success not gained through involvement, and advantages of being involved.

The next step was selecting the SLDB alumni to participate in the study. Based on current address and telephone numbers available, 75 past SLDB members were selected, 32 who graduated from two to seven years ago and 43 who graduated from eight to fifteen years ago. A letter explaining the project (Appendix B), the survey, and a response card indicating possible telephone interview times (Appendix C) were sent to the selected alumni.

One week was set aside for the telephone interviews with a goal of 50 total interviews. From 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM and 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM were the two time

frames set aside for phone interviews each day; of course there was some flexibility in working with the availability of the interviewees. The plan was to speak with 25 alumni who graduated between two and seven years ago and also 25 who graduated between eight and fifteen years ago.

The final stage included analyzing the data received from the telephone interviews. Reviewing questions one through three would give an idea of which skills were most important to gain while in college. Then one step further, seeing how those skills impacted students' success after college could be gathered from the remaining questions. Specifically, analysis would be done on the data to see if there were any noteworthy differences between the different graduation sets of alumni. Final results would be tallied and reported in the results section of the thesis.

RESULTS

Overall, the response to the survey was positive. Thirty-four response cards and two surveys were returned. For each day of the interview week, goals were set based on the number of contacts we knew we had that day plus what we felt could be accomplished. The following was the goal table for the week.

TABLE A

<u>Day</u>	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.
<u>Time</u>					
3-5:00 PM	5	1	2	0	3
6-8:00 PM	5	2	2	3	1
other		1 (9:00PM)			
additional calls	5	6	6	8	0
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	15	25	35	46	50

Each day, individuals were contacted per their response cards and attempts were made to reach individuals who did not send back a response card. The week stretched into the next Monday as the goal of fifty was in sight, but the final count of interviews was 44. Problems that arose included wrong telephone numbers, individuals who were away on business, family responsibilities, time zone differences, and job responsibilities.

The rankings of the skills in order of importance to obtain personal/professional achievement were averaged based on 44 responses. The following table displays the

skills from most important to lesser importance based on a ranking of one to ten.

TABLE B

<u>Skill</u>	<u>Ranking</u>
Communication	1.86
Confidence	4.23
Organizing/Planning	4.32
Teamwork	4.47
Decision making	5.07
Time management	5.34
Assertiveness	6.45
Managerial	6.95
Creativity	7.20
Autonomy	8.30

Looking at these results by the different graduation time groups, there were some slight differences in the order the skills were ranked in. The following table gives this information.

TABLE C

<u>2 to 7 years out</u>	<u>8 to 15 years out</u>
Communication	Communication
*Teamwork	Confidence
*Organizing/Planning	Organizing/Planning
Time Management	Teamwork
Confidence	Decision Making
Decision Making	Time Management
Assertiveness	Creativity
Managerial	Assertiveness
Creativity	Managerial
Autonomy	Autonomy

* denotes a tie.

The skills believed to be gained through involvement in student organizations were as follows, from the skill mentioned most through the skill mentioned the least.

TABLE D

<u>Skill</u>	<u># of times mentioned</u>
Communication	44
Teamwork	43
Time management	38
Organizing/ Planning	36
Decision making	33
Confidence	33
Creativity	27
Assertiveness	25
Managerial	19
Autonomy	12

Once again looking at the results in greater detail, by the time frame in which the interviewee graduated, slight differences were seen. The following table gives the rankings of the skills each group felt they had gained through involvement.

TABLE E

<u>2 to 7 years out</u>	<u>8 to 15 years out</u>
Communication	Teamwork
*Teamwork	Communication
*Confidence	*Organizing/Planning
*Time Management	*Time Management
•Decision Making	Decision Making
•Organizing/Planning	Confidence
Creativity	Creativity
Assertiveness	Assertiveness
Managerial	Managerial
Autonomy	Autonomy

* and • denote ties within respective columns.

Skills still used today were ranked in the following order based on number of times mentioned.

TABLE F

<u>Skill</u>	<u># of times mentioned</u>
Communication	43
Organizing/Planning	42
Time management	42
Assertiveness	41
Decision making	40
Team work	39
Confidence	38
Managerial	34
Creativity	30
Autonomy	29

Perhaps the most difference between the general and the detail results were seen in what skills were still used today. This information is as follows.

TABLE G

<u>2 to 7 years out</u>	<u>8 to 15 years out</u>
*Communication	Assertiveness
*Organizing/Planning	Communication
*Time Management	*Organizing/Planning
•Teamwork	*Time Management
•Decision Making	*Decision Making
•Managerial	•Teamwork
•Creativity	•Confidence
≈Assertiveness	Managerial
≈Confidence	Autonomy
Autonomy	Creativity

*, •, ≈ denote ties within respective columns.

For 91 percent of the interview population, being involved in student organizations played a role in obtaining their first job. Approximately half of those surveyed felt that involvement had helped them during interviews with communication and their confidence. Several felt that student activities were definite resume builders and helped create conversation in interviews. Teamwork was an important skill they felt they had gained through extracurricular involvement that was an asset during those first job interviews. Seven people expressed that involvement had opened doors for them and helped with networking for that first job. Other skills gained from involvement that were mentioned that stood out during interviews included time management, organization, assertiveness, delegating, and accomplishing goals.

The top five skills that were transferable from student organization involvement to individual's jobs were communication, confidence, time management, teamwork, and assertiveness. Creativity was mentioned as a skill used in extracurricular activities that could now be used on the job by ten individuals. Many other skills such as organizing, decision making, general management, networking, leadership interpersonal skills, and problem solving skills were also mentioned.

Technical/computer skills, delegation, personnel skills, and general management skills were most often mentioned as not gained through involvement but necessary for success. Also, several individuals said they would have liked a better understanding of what life after college would be like. Time management, assertiveness, and organizing were stated as skills that one could always improve. Lack of competence in areas such as fundraising, long range planning, budgeting, and problem solving was also apparent from the number of individuals who mentioned these skills. Dealing with people through counseling, patience, humility, and/or

— constructive criticism also seemed to be an area that students needed more exposure to while involved in extracurricular activities.

Advantages that the interviewees felt, they as college graduates who were involved, had over those who were not involved included better communication skills, teamwork capabilities, organization, interpersonal skills, and social skills. Overall they felt they had greater self-confidence and were better prepared for the real world. As self professed hard workers and leaders, several felt they could run meetings and plan events more effectively, gain respect more easily, and had more contacts and opportunities to network. Other positive outcomes from campus involvement that were mentioned were the ability to manage, to set goals and accomplish them, and to make decisions.

Through the first set of conversations, the realization became apparent that it might be of some interest to know whether or not these individuals were still involved, to what degree, and why they were or were not still involved. This eighth question was asked of most of the participants. Results were split about evenly with some saying yes they were still involved while others said no they were not.

Involvement of those who said yes included professional affiliations, civic groups, church organizations, and volunteer organizations. Several said it was still hard to say no to getting involved, that they felt the need to help others, and that they still spent too much time in organizations. Those who said their involvement level had decreased or was nonexistent said it was due to family and/or work commitments. Many individuals mentioned that once out of college they reviewed their priorities and that their career had to come first. A few people mentioned that possible burnout caused them to limit their involvement now.

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CONCLUSIONS

Student involvement in extracurricular activities is encouraged at Ball State University. The effects this involvement has on students' success after college was the focus of this project. By surveying BSU Alumni who were members of the Student Leadership Development Board some insight was gained on how their involvement during college influenced their post-college success. Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions were drawn and recommendations made.

Overwhelmingly, communication skills were reported as the most important skill to have for personal/professional achievement. Additionally, it topped the list of skills gained through involvement in extracurricular activities and skills still utilized today in a career setting. Communication, the ability to express feelings, ideas, and information in either verbal or written format to a variety of people, plays a role in every activity of life. The better one can communicate and relay information to others, the more successful one will be.

Organizing/planning, teamwork, decision making, and time management are also skills that most students gain from involvement, are most necessary for success and are still used today by most individuals in their jobs. Life skills can always be improved though. No one can ever be fully prepared for every situation that may arise. Learning to deal with crisis and unpopular decision making in the somewhat secure boundaries of college is a useful experience. Topics such as delegation, budgeting, self evaluation, and long range planning seem to need more attention.

A campus culture needs to offer experiences similar to those encountered in everyday life after college, the "real world". This type of culture could provide a better understanding of life after college. Even though autonomy, creativity, and managerial skills were of lesser importance for achievement of personal and professional success, attainment of these skills should still be a goal of the involvement mission. Allowing students themselves to be more responsible for every aspect of the activities of their organization could encourage growth in these areas. As students see that they can lead meetings, plan events, and organize projects without being told every step to take, they will become more comfortable with their managerial skills and feel more independent. The ability to effectively manage and to take initiative can lead to success in a variety of situations and eventually foster career success.

Often times, organizations get into the groove of doing the same activities year in and year out. Students should be encouraged to be creative by putting a new twist on old ideas. No idea is a bad idea; some of the biggest successes in history started from what some may have felt was a bad idea. This thought should be kept in mind as individuals work on projects for their employer. One individual's creative idea could profit the entire company.

By setting up a network between organizations at the same institutions and at others, unlimited resources can become available for organizations as a whole and for individual members. New and innovative ideas for programming could be shared. Also, solutions to group dynamic problems could be discussed. This type of networking was mentioned as a skill that was needed in the workplace.

The more campus life mimics the "real world", the easier the transition from

college to career will be and the higher the probability of success. One way to increase students' sense of the "real world" might include more direct work with the community. Student groups should find organizations in the community that have similar goals and work to achieve them together. Often there are imaginary walls built up around colleges and universities; these barriers need to be broken down and members of society should be welcomed in to share what life is really like with students.

Before the above recommendations for improving what students attain from extracurricular activities can be looked into, involvement must be a part of the students' experience. Making it clear to prospective students that involvement is an important part of their college experience, they will come to the university with the expectation that they must get involved. Students will look for extracurricular activity opportunities. This is where the second phase of institutional communication comes into effect.

The involvement opportunities need to be made available. When, where, and how often students are told about opportunities could play a major role in how involved they chose to become. Information needs to be available before students get into their routine for the school year, so that out-of-class opportunities can become a part of their daily schedule. Clearly, getting students involved during their first year would be very beneficial. First they would have several years to grow in these experiences and secondly would have more time to investigate different activities.

Once students are involved in extracurricular activities, keeping those students active is vital. Continuity in student organizations provides healthy support for the

attainment of their goals. Every member has unique qualities and ideas to add to the group; everyone must feel important and that their ideas are needed. Personal inventories on why students joined a particular organization and what they hope to gain from it would prove beneficial for the students and the group. Being able to visualize what they could gain and then actually seeing those achievements would make the experience more worthwhile. This could lead to students encouraging students to become more involved.

Further studies could look at specific involvements and the specific skills gained from them. This could lead to allowing students to build a better portfolio of involvement based on their individual needs. Assessment of students' needs and how involvement can accommodate them is an area that needs further research and development. Knowing what kind of assessment tools and when to put them to use could aid student affairs administrators as they strive to provide better student services.

INVOLVEMENT SURVEY

1. Rank the following skills from 1 to 10 (1 being most important, 10 being of lesser importance) in order of importance to obtain personal/professional achievement.
2. Check the skills that you believe you gained through being involved in student organizations.
3. Check the skills that you still use today.

	1.	2.	3.
Communication	_____	_____	_____
Team Work	_____	_____	_____
Decision Making	_____	_____	_____
Organizing/Planning	_____	_____	_____
Assertiveness	_____	_____	_____
Time Management	_____	_____	_____
Managerial	_____	_____	_____
Creativity	_____	_____	_____
Autonomy	_____	_____	_____
Confidence	_____	_____	_____

4. Did being involved in student organizations play a role in obtaining your first job? If so, how?
5. What skills do you believe you gained from student organization involvement were transferable to your first professional job?
6. What skills have you found to be necessary for success that you did not gain while involved in student organizations?
7. What advantages do you have as a college graduate who was involved in student organizations?

February 25, 1994

Dear Student Leadership Development Board Alum:

As a former member of the Student Leadership Board, you have been selected to participate in a survey. As part of a master degree of Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education and an Honors College Thesis, we are conducting research to evaluate the benefits of being involved in student organizations. Specifically, we are looking at the affect involvement during college has upon one's personal and professional success after college.

We hope that you will help us in this endeavor by allowing us to speak with you over the phone during the week of March 14-18, 1994. Enclosed is a survey of questions we will be asking and a response postcard listing possible dates and times we can contact you. You will also find the phone number(s) we have for you; please confirm on postcard. Note, times suggested are Eastern Standard Time. If you are unavailable at these times, please indicate a more suitable time.

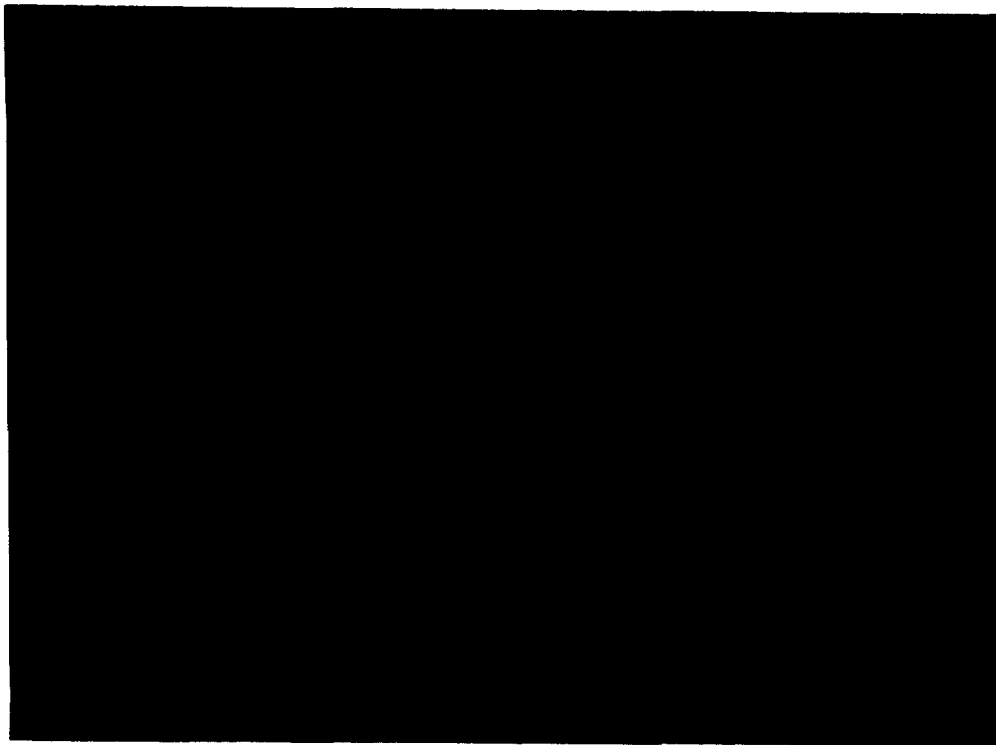
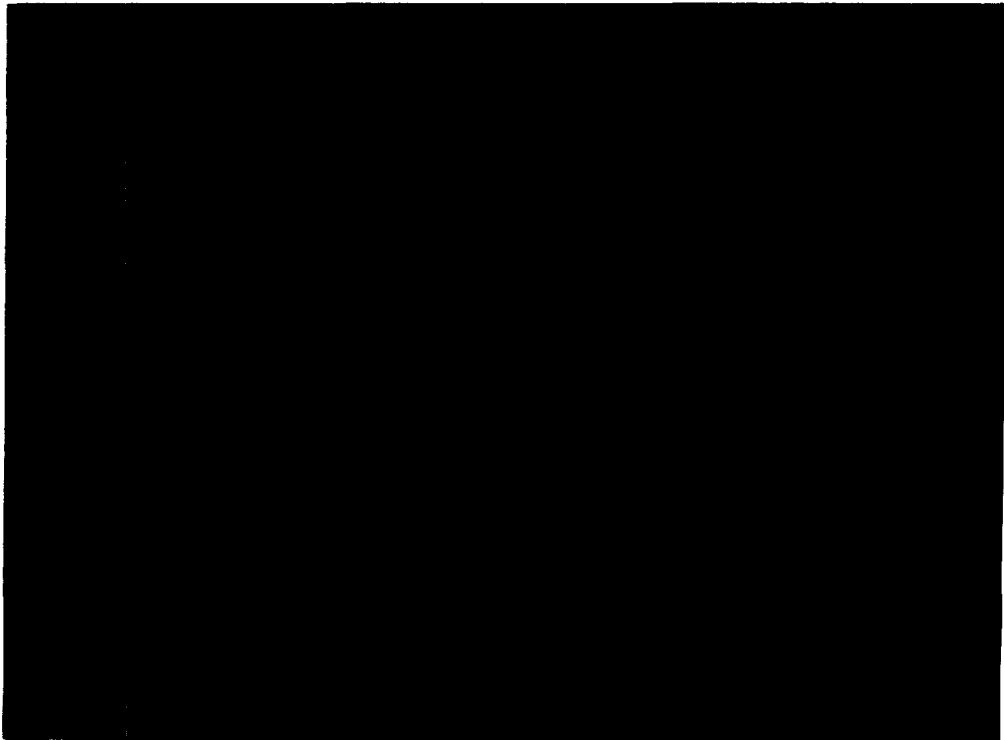
Thank you for your quick response. We look forward to speaking with you the week of March 14-18, 1994.

Sincerely,

Stacey Keffaber
Graduate Assistant

Angela R. Tatum
Current S.L.D.B. Member

RESPONSE POSTCARD



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